

**FAIRBANKS METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM
TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

**City of Fairbanks Engineering Conference Room
800 Cushman Street
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701**

**Meeting Minutes
January 7, 2009**

1. Call to Order

Donna Gardino called the meeting to order at 12:03pm.

2. Introduction of Members and Attendees

The following were present:

- * FMATS Policy Committee members
- ** FMATS Staff members
- *** FMATS Technical Committee members

NAME	REPRESENTING
*** Donna Gardino	FMATS Coordinator
*** Ethan Birkholz	DOT&PF
*** Bill Butler	City of North Pole
*** Glenn Miller	FNSB Transit
*** Bruce Carr	ARRC
*** Joan Hardesty	ADEC
*** Bernardo Hernandez	(12:09) FNSB Director Community Planning
*** Mike Schmetzer	City of Fairbanks
*** Bob Pristash	City of Fairbanks
***	FNSB Planning Commission
*** Marc Wohlford	(absent) UAF Facilities Services
*** Michael Meeks	(absent) Ft. Wainwright
*** Eric Fitzgerald	(absent) Tanana Chiefs Conference
** Todd Boyce	FNSB
** Margaret Carpenter	DOT&PF
Kathleen Vincent	City of Fairbanks
Meadow Bailey	DOT Public Information
Matt Stone	PDC
Mary Pagel	URS Corporation
Kathy Stringham	Eielson AFB

3. Public Comment

4. Approval of the January 7, 2009 Agenda.

- **MOTION:** To approve the January 7, 2009 agenda. (Carr/Schmetzer). Glenn Miller requested the addition of Sidewalk Clearing as an Informational Item. Bernardo Hernandez requested under Other Issues the addition of Smart Growth.
- **MOTION:** To approve the January 7, 2009 agenda as amended. (Hernandez/ Schmetzer)
None opposed. Approved.

5. Approval of the December 3, 2008 Minutes.

- **MOTION:** To approve the December 3, 2008 minutes. (Carr/Birkholz). None opposed. Approved.

6. Committee Reports.

a. Barnette/Cushman Subcommittee

Donna updated the committee on the Policy Committee's approval of changing the scope of the Barnette Street project from 10th to Gaffney to 7th to Gaffney, as well as the funding modifications as proposed by the subcommittee. The approved funding changes included increasing Gaffney Road Stage I to \$525,000 decreasing Gaffney Road Stage II \$1.125 million and increasing Barnette 10th to Gaffney \$1.135 million. Donna commended the subcommittee's efforts in presenting the information clearly.

7. Old Business

8. New Business

a. PM 2.5 Non-Attainment (NA) Designation

Donna thanked Todd for compiling the NA area maps included in the packets, with roads indicated, which will serve to demonstrate for residents whether or not their homes fall within the NA area. The NA area designation will become official in April 2009.

Noting Juneau's simultaneous designation, Glenn confirmed the designation as illustrated and explained that the plan for addressing this issue is in progress. Referencing the map, Glenn pointed out the new NA area boundaries as accepted by the EPA which includes approximately 90% of the population residing within the MPO, with the exceptions of areas on the west side of Chena Ridge and the east side of Chena Hot Springs Road. He reminded the committee that this is a revision of the originally larger boundary that EPA had proposed which had included Eielson AFB and the area south of the Tanana River to the mountains.

Glenn inserted that monitoring will continue throughout the remainder of this winter and into next in order to determine any need for boundary modifications, as well as to determine PM 2.5 sources, their level of contribution and any mitigation potential. Glenn assured the committee that he "feels, right now, that (the boundaries) are pretty accurate."

Glenn emphasized that because the MPO boundary is within the NA area, there could be implications for future projects, as they will need to meet conformity standards once a conformity plan is submitted to EPA. This plan is due April 2012 and attainment is expected to follow by April 2014.

Bernardo inquired about burning bans within the NA boundary area. Glenn stated that ban areas do exist but the area is different as it is based on CO mitigation data. Bernardo asked if the boundary would be modified to the PM 2.5 NA area. Glenn replied no, but that the area may need to be reconsidered since CO is no longer the issue.

Bruce asked Glenn about the process for applying for federal grants under the constraints of NA. Glenn confirmed that, for now, from a planning and conformity standpoint, the committee need not change its approach, however he clarified that it is advisable for the committee to weigh in the factor of PM 2.5 mitigation proactively. Bruce asked for further confirmation that EPA regulation does not prohibit the further processing of federal grant requests in lieu of a submitted conformity plan and Glenn assured the committee that he does not understand this to be the case "and that if (he) found out different, (he) would report back."

Regarding the conformity plan deadline of April 2009, Glenn reminded the committee of the time consuming process of data collection, plan development, and the submittal to EPA by the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) . Glenn further emphasized the urgency in the borough initiating the process. Ultimately it is the state's responsibility, but the borough is currently taking the lead and conducting the monitoring and mitigation efforts. But if the borough discontinues this effort, it will be in the hands of the state.

Bruce followed up regarding federal funding and inquired whether or not there is an effect on Department of Transportation (DOT) once the conformity plan is submitted, and if so whether or not it need be included in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Ethan replied that it does ultimately affect the National Highway System (NHS) roads that go through the area.

As for the integration into the STIP, Donna clarified that it is the state's implementation plan that Glenn was referring to developing for PM 2.5.

Bernardo asked, and Glenn verified that if data collection was to continue through this winter and next, then realistically the plan could not be fully initiated until after the process of data collection is complete, at which point a consultant would be hired. However, Glenn went on to add that he is hopeful that enough data could be collected this winter to begin drafting and the additional data collected next winter would serve to strengthen it.

Margaret requested clarification on whether the integration of PM 2.5 considerations must occur immediately for all projects. Donna reconfirmed that it does not.

9. Public Comment Period

No comments.

10. Other Issues

a. Smart Growth

Bernardo asked if any progress had been made in arranging for DOT to sponsor a smart growth training. Donna responded that she had expressed the committees desire to have a smart growth training to DOT headquarters as well as having researched potential training opportunities available through the National Highway Institute (NHI) with nothing new to report.

Bruce recommended that Donna also look at American Planning Association (APA) for potential Smart Growth training opportunities.

11. Informational Items

a. Northern Rail Extension- Draft EIS Public Meetings

The draft EIS addresses the construction and operation of a rail line between North Pole and Delta Junction and multiple public comment meetings are being held. Bruce commented that these Draft EIS public comment meetings are being held by the Surface Transportation Board (STB), not the Alaska Railroad (AKRR). The STB is producing the EIS, and the AKRR is subject to a similar 30 day comment period. Bruce urged the public to attend.

b. FMATS Allocation and Formula Review

Donna referred to the packet insert 17 AAC 05.55 STIP, the administrative code defining how the MPO allocation is determined, which was provided 1. as background information on how the formula is derived 2. as a demonstration of the criteria that the DOT Commissioner can choose from in order to determine the allocation that goes to the MPO and 3. as an example of the formula that will be used to determine the FMATS and Anchorage Metropolitan Area

Transportation System (AMATS) allocation. Donna reported that Ron King from DOT headquarters will be attending the next Policy Committee Meeting on January 21, 2009. Bruce recommended that due to lack of FMATS staff and oversight in the past, that these numbers be revisited to ensure that FMATS is in fact receiving the appropriate allocation.

Bruce inserted that all of these percentages are based on regulation and that the state creates this regulation. Bruce proposed an approach for questioning this percentage may be to create a case, for example, on how 39% for CTP is an inadequate level of funding for planning to deal with the NA area issue. He further suggested that this approach may be most effective if it was to come from the MPO collectively asking for 45% as a more adequate allocation.

As for the recommendation for using the NA for leverage, Donna informed the committee that in preparation for the upcoming NA designation, a November/December DOT meeting revealed that FMATS "should expect" to receive additional 2-3 million more in CMAQ funding per year due to the fact that NA areas are to be given priority for the mandatory CMAQ funding (as opposed to the flexible CMAQ funding which gets distributed throughout the state). In support of this expectation, Donna pointed out the potential decrease in competition for these funds due to the fact that Juneau may not be designated a NA area as previously expected.

Glenn added to this stating that Juneau has in fact had some exceedences throughout the year, therefore it has yet to be determined whether this competition for CMAQ funding exists. Glenn then asked about Anchorage's CMAQ funding. Ethan said Anchorage will get none of the mandatory CMAQ funding, but is likely to get some unknown amount of the flexible CMAQ funding.

Ethan explained how the 65/35 split is derived and stated that changing the parameters would, in fact, change the percentages. When this formula is applied based on the 5 factors chosen in 2006, he said that the result is 26% for Anchorage and 12% for Fairbanks. These percentages are then multiplied by the percent population, which is $26\% \times 99\%$ and $12\% \times 72\%$, and the end result is approximately 35.5%.

Ethan also inserted, in response to Bruce's comment on changing the percentage, that he questions whether or not this small percentage increase would be significant if in fact this 2006 formula was recalculated based on revised parameters. Donna noted that revising these parameters would require current data on injury, fatality, etc.

Ethan went on to say that for the purpose of facilitating the current amendment to the STIP, DOT headquarters does not want to change the parameters, but rather wait and revisit them when compiling the 2010-2013 STIP.

Bernardo echoed that revisiting the formula for the sake of getting a larger percent of the overall MPO allocation would not make much of a difference, but rather he suggested that the committee could be better served to look to areas such as the 3% federal flexible spending or the 48% of NHS/AHS project spending that is coming into Fairbanks due to the impact on the transportation program.

Bernardo went on to question the state's overall priorities and vision as compared to other states that rely on a more comprehensive approach which integrates land use and transportation planning.

Donna acknowledged the need for another pot of funds. She said that potentially looking to the state for this money is an option. Donna further reminded the entire committee that they have the potential to affect this situation.

Ethan responded to Bernardo's comment on integration and stated that he thinks that the crux of the matter is that land use issues and smart growth initiatives tend not to be funded and therefore evaporate as money is used up on a project. He suggested that if there was a way to lock in the funding, then progress could be made on Bernardo's suggestion.

Bernardo argued that smart growth is not necessarily an unfunded mandate, but rather a new philosophy that is being adopted across the country to ensure the efficient utilization of resources. Bernardo stated that he does not believe that FMATS is currently of this philosophy which ensures long term sustainability of land use and transportation combined in Alaska, but rather stuck in the mentality that existed 30 years ago when funding was more abundant in this state. He pointed out the lack of coordinated vision for the future.

Bruce agreed that there is a need for a statewide transportation policy, not just a project plan. He questioned the context within which these plans are derived. In support of this need, Bruce referenced states such as Washington that have such a policy that integrates smart growth, stating that Alaska does not have this vision.

Bernardo then asked the open ended question of how to reach those that want to foster such a vision for this state.

c. TIP Conformity Update/Draft TIP

Ethan stated that an RFP for small procurement has been posted to the website. This conformity determination is a necessary step in the approval of the draft TIP due to significant changes in the TIP since 2005.

Donna noted that this is the cause of the delay in the TIP timeline. The next step is to go out for agency consultation, then next to public comment period on the draft TIP and conformity determination. Ethan added that this should be a short turnaround time once the consultant is on board.

Bruce asked which TIP we are doing conformity on and Donna replied that it is the 2009-2012 draft TIP. Donna went on to say that to delay the process, which was to go to public comment on January 1, 2009, is best until the conformity process is under way because the conformity determination must be approved by the Policy Committee before they can approve the TIP, which then goes to the Governor. Bruce recommended putting them out simultaneously so that conformity changes could be efficiently integrated into the TIP and Donna concurred that that is already the plan because it saves time in the process.

d. LRTP Update

Margaret reported that she is waiting on the final comments back on the scope of services which should be finished by this week or next. Ethan further clarified that the consultants have received the final comments and that the scope is being revised accordingly.

Bernardo asked what the actual scope of LRTP was or if it was just a "laundry list of projects".

Donna assured the integration of smart growth concepts into the LRTP as has been done in the (Unified Planning Work Program) UPWP. Donna further assured that there is a freight element to the plan, that there are climate change considerations being made in the plan, and that an attempt is being made to integrate all of the new SAFTEA-LU planning factors. Ethan added that the public involvement plan is also being updated.

Bernardo inquired as to whether or not the latest scope of the LRTP is available online somewhere. Ethan said it is not because the scope is still being revised consultant in the latest. Bernardo requested that it be emailed to him for review. Donna said that she reviewed it and provided comments which included some of these elements which were in fact missed in the previous draft. Margaret added that DEC and the borough also commented on the draft.

Bernardo asked who from the Borough was involved and Donna clarified that it was a Jim Conner that commented on air quality.

Bruce asked for clarification that this is in fact the FMATS LRTP that is being discussed. Donna confirmed. Ethan added that the statewide LRTP is posted online. And Donna added that she hopes that with the additional staff that FMATS can play a stronger role in assisting Ethan and Margaret at DOT in the future development of the FMATS LRTP. Bruce added that this is because it is all being paid out of the UPWP.

Donna stated in the Coordinator's agreement, it stated that the state would run this process of the FMATS LRTP development. But now that FMATS has a staff, it makes sense to take this on. Ethan confirmed that when we did the agreement, FMATS did not have a coordinator's office and that it was time to revisit this agreement.

e. Annual Listing of Obligated Projects for FFY08

Donna pointed out that this Annual Listing of Federally Obligated Projects is a required document under SAFTEA-LU to provide for greater transparency in the process. It is a list of all projects obligated, including investments in pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities.

Donna referenced the five page document listing all projects that were obligated for the FFY08. This was developed by FMATS in coordination with transit system, as well as the state as required by the regulation. Ethan asked if this information is posted on the website and Donna said it has been requested.

f. Airport Way/Cushman Street Intersection Roundabout Evaluation

Donna explained that, at the end of the year, a draft technical memorandum about a possible Airport Way/Cushman Street intersection roundabout had been circulated to Bernardo, Mike and Bob for comment. Since no comments have been received in writing, Donna sent a letter on behalf of the technical committee, after discussions with the City Engineer.

With regards to the roundabout itself, Donna stated that she is of the opinion that it would be both aesthetically pleasing and technically feasible. Bernardo inserted that it appeared to cost the same as signaling the intersection and Donna disagreed that that is in fact the case.

Donna would like to urge the state to consider and evaluate roundabouts as a preferable design alternative.

Bob commented that at this point it appears as if a roundabout would work as well as a signalized intersection, but the argument for the roundabout was not entirely convincing. Bob spoke to the cost comparison of the roundabout versus a signalized intersection and clarified that in order to have a roundabout at the Airport Way/Cushman Intersection, a nearby signal would have to be moved and this cost was not factored into the estimates.

Additionally, Bob noted that another roundabout at Noble would be needed and that the potential exists for the Airport Way/Cushman roundabout would need to be three-lane by 2020. And that it was unclear as to whether that was factored into the system but regardless it does not appear that the cost would be equivalent to that of a signalized intersection. Bob went on to

recognize that it is just a technical memo and a roundabout should not be disregarded at this point.

Bernardo urged the committee to pursue the roundabout idea. Bob agreed that it should be pursued if it is in line with Vision Fairbanks, however he cautioned the committee to learn from the Cushman/Barnette system example and the delayed realization of its need and the associated cost increases. The cost of the roundabout needs to first be evaluated as a system.

Ethan reminded that the roundabout is NHS project, not an FMATS project. He went on to explain that the South Cushman project is a split project between FMATS and NHS and that the vast majority is NHS. Donna requested that Ethan take the comments back to Dave, DOT/Traffic. Ethan agreed to do so, although he added that he had already had this conversation with him.

Bernardo asked about what DOT's response has been up to this point and Ethan explained that DOT is in favor of a signalized intersection due to the increased cost and hassle. The increased cost and hassle are attributable to various considerations such as the 1. additional need for right-of-way, 2. need for a complimentary roundabout at Noble Street, 3. associated need for additional work on Gaffney Road, 4. need to revise the almost completed environmental assessment (EA), and 5. time trap issue and resulting need for an extension from FHWA.

Bernardo asked if revisiting the EA is the time consuming part that he mentioned previously. Ethan said that it is not and that the process to revisit would take approximately a year. Bernardo asked what portion would be time consuming and Ethan answered that it would be the right-of-way portion. Donna inserted that once you begin to obtain right-of-way then have up to 20 years; therefore eliminating the timetrapp concern from the equation in considering whether or not to pursue the roundabout alternative.

Ethan said that DOT is at a deciding point and that it is likely that they will choose a signalized intersection; and given that the city and borough have bought into the roundabout concept, he further emphasized the timing given the high cost of revisiting the issue once the decision is made to make the intersection signalized and once the right-of-way process is initiated.

Mike reminded the committee that they had collectively recommended that the LRTP adopt Vision Fairbanks, which the Policy Committee has done. Mike suggested that the NHS project should recognize that fact in this decision making process. Ethan pointed out the distinction between the concept of Vision Fairbanks and the details of implementing Vision Fairbanks. Mike persisted in saying that regardless it does not seem as if the adoption of Vision Fairbanks is being recognized in the EA. Ethan said he personally has limited power of influence in this process as compared to, say another outside body may have.

Mike pointed out the safety aspect. Ethan noted that safety has not been mentioned in the comments thus far and confirmed the significance of the safety factor in terms of reduction in accident related fatalities. Donna added that the Airport Way/Cushman intersection is one of the 5 worst intersections for accidents in Fairbanks and noted that a roundabout would increase its safety.

Mike inquired if perhaps the next step, beyond sending a letter directly to Dave Bloom at DOT, is to take this issue to the Policy Committee and have them direct DOT to reevaluate this EA for a roundabout. Donna stated that the reason she had initially gone directly to Dave Bloom is because it was urgent. She went on to agree that the committee should act. Donna will add this as agenda item for the January 21, 2009 Policy Committee meeting.

Bruce cited the success of Anchorage's new roundabouts. He went on to commend the FMATS obvious commitment to a progressive vision. He recommended that the Technical Committee prep the Policy Committee with the appropriate questions. For example, he suggested prepping the Policy Committee with the same long term vision that the Technical Committee is adhering to in this process, recognizing the fact one year is likely to be lost in the transition; however emphasizing that having people sitting at a stop light 20 years from now is an even less desirable situation. He related this to the earlier conversation of the need for a stated vision.

As an aside, Mike asked Bruce, how the heated sidewalks are functioning. Bruce reported that they were working very well but that they are costly. Bruce reported that he cannot speak to whether or not they would function equally at -50 F.

Referring back to the roundabout discussion, Bernardo brought up the point of the potential for air quality improvements. Glenn confirmed that whenever you have the opportunity to keep traffic moving there is the potential to impact air quality. Bob talked about the need to move pedestrians upstream from the roundabout.

Donna asked the committee if they would like her to request that Design/DOT make this presentation to the Policy Committee at the next meeting. Bernardo replied that there must be an explanation beforehand as to why the Policy Committee is receiving this presentation. He went on to ask if the Policy Committee was going to be asked to make the recommendation at the next meeting as well, or if this would be at a different meeting.

Mike stated that he believes that the Technical Committee should send an official position to the Policy Committee. Bernardo insisted that this be in conjunction with the presentation.

MOTION: To send a formal recommendation to the Policy Committee recommending that DOT re-evaluate the EA document so as to seriously consider roundabouts as the preferred alternative to a signalized intersection at South Cushman and Airport Way, based on the identified need to improve safety, air quality, integrate context sensitive solutions, and to adhere to the Vision Fairbanks plan as adopted by the LRTP. (Schmetzer/Hernandez). None opposed. Approved.

Bruce recommended the further creation of a resolution identifying FMATS desire to use roundabouts as a solution for future traffic circulation on Airport Way, whereas safety, air quality etc.; therefore, the FMATS Policy Committee prefers roundabouts as a solution and requests that DOT evaluate the roundabout scenario in the reevaluation of the EA.

Mike asked if the Technical Committee could work through this via email and Donna accepted responsibility for drafting the resolution stating that the final would be emailed by Friday, January 16, 2009. Bruce declined comment in the process due to vacation.

g. Sidewalk Summit

Mike reported that a preliminary planning and informational meeting on how to better maintain the sidewalks and how to create a longer term plan for pedestrian and bike path development was held on Monday, January 5, 2009. In attendance were representatives from the Fairbanks North Star Borough, City of Fairbanks, DOT, Festival Fairbanks (not present, but provided comment).

Mike pointed out the past challenges faced in getting the city to recognize the lack of and provide funding for the maintenance. He also commended Anchorage's bike and pedestrian system.

Bill asked if sidewalk maintenance is currently the responsibility of the property owner and Mike replied that the city ordinance dictates that it is. Mike cited that Anchorage is similar and Bruce added that property owners actually receive fines for clearing the snow into the streets. Mike stated the Fairbanks encourages pushing it into the street. Mike also noted that many sidewalks are in disrepair and mentioned the implications for individuals, for example, in a wheelchair, specifically mentioning the state of those on Lacey and Noble.

Donna stated that it is the intent to ultimately create a long range bike and pedestrian plan, however for the purposes of the short-term, the goal is to coordinate an effort among the City, Borough, DOT and North Pole. The initial goal is to illustrate priorities on a map and then to possibly get budgetary considerations. The first steps being to identify what is currently being done, what the staffing levels are, what the budgets are, and what future priorities there may be such as schools, hospitals, high pedestrian traffic areas etc.; ultimately coming up with a comprehensive snow removal plan.

Mike pointed out the complexity and overlap and asked for subcommittee members from the Technical Committee to work on this issue. The goal in terms of timing being to have a plan by August or September. Donna added ideally before snowfall

Bernardo applauded FMATS for taking this first step.

Donna once again called for volunteers from the committee. Mike named subcommittee members as John Hass from FNSB, Glenn, Mike, Bob, and a State representative.

Bernardo recommended looking into the funding available through the Safe Routes to School program. Donna inquired if it that can be used for equipment and Meadow added that it could. Bruce mentioned the potential for getting money through the economic stimulus due to the speed at which these types of projects generate jobs.

Mike stated that the city put in such an Economic Stimulus request direct to Senator Begich that included such residential street projects. Donna mentioned that this has been examined by the city as they wanted to submit the CMAQ project for curb corner upgrades as part of the Economic Stimulus but because of the federal requirements for obligating these projects, there may not be enough time.

Bernardo questioned and Donna commented on the long range bike and pedestrian plan that we hope to develop in the future. Currently there is no funding but we may be able to do it in-house. Donna stated that she has had some initial meeting with Anchorage representatives on the this topic.

Tara will be working on the sidewalk subcommittee in Donna's absence and requested that any be information be sent to her via email.

12. Adjourn

- **Motion to adjourn.** (Birkholz/Butler) None opposed. Approved. Meeting adjourned at 1:25pm.

The next scheduled Technical Committee Meeting is February 4, 2008, at noon at City Hall, Engineer's Conference Room.

Approved: 
Donna Gardino
FMATS Technical Committee

Date: 2/4/09